THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. Government have seen the reported remarks of General Pervez Musharraf which contain his misconceptions about India's approach towards Pakistan. These remarks reflect Pakistan's compulsive hostility towards India.

Government remain committed to building trust and confidence, putting into place a stable structure of cooperaiton and addressing all outstanding issues with Pakistan in accordance with the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration. We expect Pakistan to demonstrate its adherence to these agreements by abandoning its sponsorship of crossborder terrorism and stopping its hostile propaganda against India.

PM's Principal Secretary's visit to foreign countries

2077. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary has visited a number of countries recently;

(b) if so, the details of his visit;

(c) whether he has visited USA and if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether he had discussions with the officials of various countries; and

(e) if so, what is the nature of talks and outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) Yes Sir Since the adjournment of the two Houses of Parliament on 17th May, 2000, Principal Secretary has visited Nepal, Italy Portugal and USA.

Principal Secretary to PM led a' delegation to Nepal for the Fifth High Level Task Force (HLTF) meeting held in Kathmandu on 6-7 June, 2000.

Principal Secretary to PM was a part of the official delegation which accompanied PM to Italy and Portugal for

bilateral meetings and also for the First India-EU Summit in Lisbon, from 25—29 June, 2000.

Principal Secretary to PM visited USA from 18—27 July, 2000 (inclusive of travel time).

(d) to (e) Yes Sir. Principal Secretary to PM visited USA in connection with advance preparation of PM's forthcoming visit to USA in September, 2000.

Principal Secretary held talks with several senior officials in the US administration in order to ensure a substantive programme and a successful

outcome of the visit. Appointment of Ambassador/High Commissioner

2078. SHRI RAMA CHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of countries where Ambassadors/High Commissioners have been appointed by Government;

(b) the criteria adopted for appointing the Ambassadors/High Commissioners in foreign countries; and

(c) the number of Ambassadors/High Commissioners belonging to OBC/SC/ST amongst them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) The number of countries where Ambassadors/High Commissioners have been appointed by the Government of India is 114.

(b) The appointments of Ambassadors/High Commissioners to foreign countries are decided on the basis of a numebr of criteria which include, *inter alia*, their seniority, career, relevant experience and an overall suitability for the tasks and the posts.

(c) The number of Ambassadors/High Commissioners belonging to OBC/SC/ST is as follows:

OBC: Since at the time of appointment of the present Ambassadors/ High Commissioners, there was no classification of OBC, the total strength in this category is not reflected in the records.

SC: 9

ST: 7

India's role In solving Srilankan ethnic problems

2079. SHRI CM. IBRAHIM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during his recent visit to Sri Lanka, he expressed India's readiness to play a bigger role to help that country to resolve their ethnic problem and to help revive their economy;

(b) if so, the precise offer made and the Sri Lanka'n response thereto; and